

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, October 25, 2013

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Governor Chafee, RIDE to launch Educator Autonomy Project

I have been working closely over the past few weeks with Governor Chafee's staff to launch a new initiative, the Educator Autonomy Project. To begin this project, Governor Chafee is appointing an Educator Autonomy Working Group, made up of a wide range of stakeholders, which will meet regularly, will consider input from the community, and will develop a set of recommendations for how we might restructure governance to allow for more autonomy for educators and for schools. As I have written about this project: "We believe that we ... need to make sure our current system of schools allows our state's educators to unleash innovation in classrooms and schools through more autonomy and collaboration at the school/teacher level. In summary, we believe we must ensure barriers to the professional decision-making of our educators are removed. The objective of this project is to identify what can be done to create the next level of student achievement with a focus on increasing local autonomy along with the appropriate accountability to ensure quality." Working toward increasing opportunities for autonomy is a

personal priority and is among my performance goals for the current school year, and I am confident that this initiative will help in our work toward transforming education in Rhode Island. I will keep you informed about this project and about recommendations the Working Group may develop.

2. Annual school-safety conference to be held on November 1

Every year, the Emergency Management Agency calls together school and public-safety officials for a conference on safety in our schools. In light of the tragic events over the past two weeks in Nevada and in Danvers, Massachusetts, as well as the disturbing incident in which a Providence high-school student was shot in the leg, the Emergency Management Agency 2013 School Safety Conference takes on particular importance this year. A large part of the conference will entail updating the participants on the new legislation on school-safety and emergency-response plans, which RIDE helped to develop through a coalition of agencies and organizations that Governor Chafee convened in the wake of the Newtown school shootings. As you know, the new law requires school committees to annually review and approve their safety plans, and we are in the process of collecting assurances from all LEAs that this review has taken place. We are also in the process of developing model school-safety and emergency-response plans for you to use or to adapt. I hope you and members of your team will be able to join us at this conference, which will take place on Friday, November 1, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 801 Greenwich Ave., Warwick. Advance registration is recommended, by today (October 25), if possible, at:

<http://form.jotformpro.com/form/32754205925960>

3. RIDE, Congressman Langevin to hold conference on healthcare professions

On Saturday, November 2, I will join Congressman Jim Langevin for a Multiple Pathways conference that we are co-sponsoring. This conference will focus on the healthcare professions, and it will feature a student panel and a healthcare-professionals panel. We will present teachers, school counselors, family members, and students with information about career opportunities in healthcare and about the pathways that can lead interested students to college and to successful careers in the healthcare field. The conference will open for registration at 9:30 a.m., with the program beginning at 10 a.m., at the New England Institute of Technology, 1 New England Tech Blvd., East Greenwich. If you or people on your team are interested in attending, please contact Stacy Mello, at RIDE, at 222-8944 or stacy.mello@ride.ri.gov.

4. North Providence teacher named R.I. Art Educator of the Year

Congratulations to Patricia A. Lucciola, whom the Rhode Island Art Education Association has honored as the Overall Outstanding Art Educator of the Year. Patricia has been teaching art at her alma mater, North Providence High School, for 24 years. Please see this wonderful [story](#) about Patricia and her work that ran this week in the Valley Breeze. I also want to congratulate Amanda P. Rapoza, of East Providence, the Middle School Art Educator of the Year; Alison M. Plump, of the International Charter School, and Michelle D. Turner, of the Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, the Elementary School Art Educators of the Year; and Jessica Perry, of The Wolf School, the Special Needs Art Educator of the Year.

From RIDE

Common Core:

5. RIDE offers additional dates for professional development on Mathematics Common Core State Standards

RIDE is pleased to be able to offer two additional dates for the professional development session focusing on the concept of function as developed in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This workshop will highlight the types of experiences students should have in order to develop a deep understanding of this critical concept, as described in the CCSS content standards. The workshop will also highlight the variety of expertise required by the Standards for Mathematical Practice. Participants will examine the progression and focus of the function standards from 8th grade through Algebra 1, and the participants will see how these standards build on work in the earlier grades. The new sessions are scheduled for:

- Tuesday, March 4, 2014 – Coventry Public Schools Administration Building, 1675 Flat River Rd.
- Monday, March 31, 2014 – Warwick Public Schools Administration Building, 34 Warwick Lake Ave.

Follow the link below for registration:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Professional-Development>

For questions regarding this Mathematics CCSS professional development, please contact, Susan Pagliaro, at susan.pagliaro@ride.ri.gov, or Patricia Carnevale, at patricia.carnevale@ride.ri.gov.

6. RIDE to help schedule community outreach on the Common Core

RIDE received a grant from the GE Foundation to help parents and the community understand what the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) mean for our students and our classrooms and how the CCSS prepare our students for college and for challenging careers. As part of this grant, throughout the current school year, RIDE will be conducting outreach to help promote increased understanding of the CCSS throughout the state. We are developing materials and CCSS videos, and we are scheduling outreach events throughout the state.

On our behalf, representatives from a firm called PCG Education have begun reaching out to you to schedule and plan informational outreach events in your community. At these events, members of Rhode Island Common Core Ambassadors team, a group of experienced Rhode Island educators, will work with local educators to plan a visit your communities and provide information as to how the CCSS will affect teachers and students in Rhode Island schools. In a conference this week in the Bristol Warren district, for example, the event involved a panel of teachers from the schools in the district along with several of the Common Core Ambassadors. The ambassadors are available to present on the CCSS at no cost to your LEA.

We welcome you to join us in helping Rhode Island to successfully transition to the Common Core. Please support us in planning these events and in helping to spread the word about the CCSS. Common Core resources can be found at:

www.ride.ri.gov/Transition-CCSS.

If you have any questions about this outreach, or to schedule an outreach event for parents and for your community, please contact Lauren Bryar, at CommonCoreRI@pcgus.com. An outreach handout can also be found at:

www.ride.ri.gov/CCSS-Outreach.

Health and safety:

7. Deadline extended for applications for adolescent health grant applications

RIDE will provide mini-grants, resources, tools, and professional development to up to 15 LEA partners as part of a five-year initiative to improve adolescent health through school-based teen pregnancy/STD/HIV prevention. This grant opportunity, with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control is funding, will support healthy youth development to reduce teen birth rates and STD rates among students, increase school safety and connectedness, and reduce health and educational disparities. Mini-grants will also be awarded to partnering LEAs in years two through five, as determined by federal funding.

Participating LEAs need to meet certain eligibility requirements, including a demonstrated willingness and ability to participate in this effort through July 31, 2018. The letter of intent submission deadline has been extended to Friday, **November 1**. LEA partners will receive five years of high-quality professional development and technical assistance to:

- design and deliver exemplary, science-based sexual-health education;
- improve adolescents' access to key health services;

- establish safe and supportive environments for students and staff;
- implement appropriate related policies and procedures; and
- improve health and educational outcomes.

For additional information, see the October 4, 2013, Field Memo, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Students-and-Families-Great-Schools/Health-Safety/healthy-youth-partnership.pdf>

8. High-school principals to be asked to participate in RIDE-sponsored study on behavioral health

One of the top priorities in our strategic plan for transforming education is “the development of a system of academic, social, and emotional supports for student health and well-being.” RIDE and the Rhode Island Regional Transition Centers have partnered with the University of Oregon and the National Post-School Outcome Center to conduct a research study about the behavioral health needs of high-school students in Rhode Island. On **Monday** (October 28) principals public high schools in Rhode Island will receive an invitation from the University of Oregon describing the purpose of the study. We encourage all high schools to participate. Questions regarding this project may be directed to Carolyn Aspinwall, at carolynaspinwall@ebecri.org, or to Jane Slade, at jane.slade@ride.ri.gov.

Finance:

9. RIDE requests Reimbursement for Nonpublic School Textbooks form by December 6 – *Action Item*

Note: *Corrected text from Field Memo transmitted on October 25, 2013:*

Provided that LEAs have complied with all requests from nonpublic school students, per RIGL 16-23-1 to 16-23-8, LEAs will be reimbursed for any English language arts, history, or social studies textbooks on the approved 2013-14 Textbook List for grades kindergarten through 12. To process this reimbursement, districts must complete the **FY 2013-2014 Textbook Verification Form**, located on the RIDE website. This form must be submitted by Friday, **December 6**. A single FY 2014 payment will be made in the February 2014 aid payment. Any inquiries regarding reimbursements should be directed to Kristen Cole, at 222-4681.

School Construction:

10. RIDE to honor energy-efficient, green schools on November 1

Come celebrate Rhode Island's impressive green schools with the RIDE and the Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships. Please join green-school stakeholders on Friday, **November 1**, from 4 – 6 p.m., at Claiborne Pell Elementary School, 35 Dexter St., Newport. We will be honoring recent Northeast – Collaborative for Higher Performance Schools (NE-CHPS) verified schools: the Archie Cole Middle School (in East Greenwich) and the Claiborne Pell Elementary School. Additionally, there will be a tour of the Pell School and a presentation highlighting green efforts in our state. Please [click here](#) to register for this free event.

Please contact Joseph da Silva, at 222-4294 or at Joseph.dasilva@ride.ri.gov , if you have any questions about this event.

From the U.S. Department of Education

11. Education Secretary Duncan reports on state of American education

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

On September 30, fresh off his “Strong Start, Bright Future” Back to School [bus tour](#) across the American Southwest, Education Secretary Arne Duncan returned to the National Press Club for his [annual report on the state of American education](#). “What I can tell you after nearly five years in Washington is that the public narrative that you hear inside the [Washington] Beltway and online doesn’t reflect the reality I see in classrooms and schools all across America,” he said. “This town, which so often thinks that it’s somehow the center of the universe, is, instead, an alternative universe.... Fortunately, many of the people in the real world outside the Beltway and the blogosphere have tuned out this false debate. They’re too busy actually getting the real work done. They’re focusing on students - whether they are 3 years old, 13 years old, or 33 years old.”

Compare and contrast:

“In the real world, the vast majority of people aren’t debating if college- and career-ready standards are

needed. They're not advancing false narratives about a federal takeover of schools by mind-controlling robots. They're just doing the hard work of putting high standards into practice."

"They're not questioning if a thoughtful system of evaluation and support is needed for teachers and principals. They know that evaluation has been generally meaningless, has failed to support the development of teachers and principals, and that the system is broken. They're working together to help educators strengthen their craft and build real career ladders that recognize and reward excellence."

"In the real world, most people are not against meaningful testing. They know we need some kind of test to know if kids are actually learning and to hold everyone accountable, including students themselves.... Working together, the vast majority of states are creating better tests that measure essential skills, such as critical thinking."

"Parents don't debate if it's possible to turn around a low-performing school. They can see for themselves if something is working or not working. And they are helping lead these turnaround efforts themselves."

"Here in the Washington bubble, the prevailing narrative is that reformers and unions are in a constant state of war. But, in the real world, many unions are in fact partners in reform. While the media flock to noise and controversy, the quiet, courageous work goes uncovered or unrecognized."

“As the new school year gets underway, I am inviting any member of Congress to join me as I continue to travel around the country and highlight reforms at work,” the Secretary concluded. “I invite journalists, bloggers, and policy leaders as well. Let’s go see for ourselves what is working, and then let’s bring those positive lessons back to Washington. Let’s talk to students and see what they want and what they need - for their future, not our present.... I am optimistic and inspired because of what is happening outside the Beltway, in schools, at colleges and universities, and in communities all across America.”

12. U.S. Department of Education to release Nation’s Report Card on Thursday

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

Register today to join a [live webinar](#) releasing “The Nation’s Report Card: 2013 Mathematics and Reading, Grades 4 and 8,” hosted by the National Assessment Governing Board, on **Thursday** (October 31) at 11 a.m. During the event, a select panel of experts will take an in-depth look at national and state-level data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The new report card, to be presented for the first time in an interactive, online format, will allow users to view results side-by-side and feature dynamic videos that will guide users on how to explore and interpret results,

Note: The U.S. Department of Education has moved the release date to **November 7 @ 10 a.m.**

From other organizations

13. Sustainable Schools Summit to take place November 1 - 3

Please see this notice from the Rhode Island Environmental Education Association:

The New England Environmental Education Alliance Conference and Sustainable Schools Summit will take place from **November 1 through 3**, at Salve Regina University, in Newport. This regional conference will provide a unique opportunity for teachers and administrators to increase environmental literacy and to help create and maintain effective, safe, and healthy green schools throughout New England.

The conference is organized around three strands – curriculum, environment, and health. These strands are well aligned with the U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools program, which evaluates and celebrates schools with Healthy School Environments, minimal Environmental Impact, and strong Environmental Education. Participants will hear a keynote address by David Orr and will have an opportunity to attend more than 40 hands-on workshops and field trips addressing topics ranging from “Teaching Environmental Literacy Through the Arts” to “Environmental Education and the Next Generation Science Standards.” Go to www.neeea.org to learn more and to register.

14. Students invited to enter Letters About Literature challenge

Please see this message from the Rhode Island Center for the Book:

Rhode Island students in grades 4 through 12 are invited to take the Letters About Literature challenge by writing a personal letter to an admired author - someone who has written a book that has been an inspiration for change in their lives. The deadline is **December 10** for grades 9 through 12 and **January 10**, 2014, for grades 4 through 8.

Rhode Island students have met with great success in this contest over the past eight years, with three National Winners and three National Honorable Mentions since 2003. This year brings another opportunity for teachers, parents, and librarians statewide to help their students gain state and national recognition for their writing.

By encouraging personal reader response and reflective writing, Letters About Literature supports meaningful reading and helps to create and celebrate successful writers. Teachers and librarians can download the directions for entering and the guidelines from the website:

www.read.gov/letters .

Teaching materials, including lessons plans, writing samples, and assessment checklists, are also available at this site. Letters About Literature supports national standards for teaching language arts and reading, as recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. Teachers can also successfully adapt Letters About Literature's contest theme and writing requirements to meet Common Core State Standards for

composing argument texts.

Letters About Literature awards prizes on both the state and national levels. Each state center has a panel of judges who select the top essayists in the state. State Winners at each level of competition will receive a \$50 cash award and additional prizes, and they will advance to the National Level Judging.

The National Winners will receive a \$1,000 cash award; second-place Winners will receive \$150 cash award.

Letters About Literature – 2014 is a project of the Rhode Island Center for the Book at R.I. Council for the Humanities. For information about its activities and national reading promotion networks, visit <http://www.read.gov/cfb> .

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>